

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q What is a virtual machine and why would I want one?

A A virtual machine is a simulated PC that runs entirely in software. You create one with virtual machine software, such as VirtualBox (reviewed on page 50). Each virtual machine has its own virtual memory, hard disk and optical drive, and you can install any operating system that runs on a PC.

They're handy for trying out new operating systems, as you don't have to erase your hard disk or current OS. They're also useful for developers who want to test applications or websites they're making as from a single PC you have instant access to operating systems.

Finally, as your virtual machine runs in software, any viruses or software crashes affect only that virtual machine and not your main PC. Virtual machines are a good way of trying out a new piece of software before you let it loose on your main PC.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor



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ULEAD DVD MovieFactory 6 Plus

★★★★

£50 inc VAT

DVD MovieFactory is a friendly DVD-authoring program aimed at home users, but it has never been shy of embracing new technologies. This latest version adds support for Windows Vista and is the first authoring software we've seen to support both Blu-ray and HD DVD. The Plus version we look at here also includes InterVideo WinDVD 8 Silver for DVD playback, InterVideo DVDCopy 5 for recoding non-encrypted discs and converting them to DivX, plus various data and audio disc-burning utilities. As such, DVD MovieFactory 6 Plus wouldn't be out of place in our media suites Lab test (page 123), although it lacks image-editing, backup and media-management tools.

Import and export options are comprehensive. It will capture from DV, HDV and AVCHD (a new high-definition MPEG4-based format) cameras, digital TV tuners and analogue video-capture devices. There's a huge list of supported file types, although we were disappointed to discover that native HDV footage in .m2t format could be imported into some modules but not others. Output from the main authoring application is to DVD-Video, Video CD, Super VCD and HD DVD. We had no problems writing an HD DVD disc image to our hard disk, but the bundled copy of InterVideo WinDVD 8 Silver couldn't play it.

Version 6 adds some basic video-editing tools, which might come in handy if you just want to string a few video clips together and add transitions. You can also add intro and end sequences with themes such as Wedding or Athletic, but they're a little cheesy. Slideshow support remains strong, with the ability to create collages and add text. It's now possible to customise the path for Pan & Zoom effects, but doing so is awkward and the same pan and zoom is applied to every photo, which somewhat defeats the purpose.

Ulead has expanded the range of menu templates to a total of 42 – a vast improvement on the 16 in version 5 – arranged into three groups according to the style of buttons: text, thumbnails and animated. Animated buttons are normally tricky to create in DVD menus, but DVD MovieFactory manages it through various technical tricks while

SUMMARY

- ✓ Attractive animated menus
- ✓ A strong collection of supporting features
- ✗ Basic disc-navigation options

DVD-AUTHORING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP or Vista, 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), 900MB disk space, DirectX 9 graphics and sound cards
SUPPLIER www.ulead.co.uk/store
DETAILS www.ulead.co.uk



▲ The launcher utility presents most – but strangely not all – the various tasks on offer

keeping the user controls as simple as with the other menu styles. The only downside is that navigating menus in the resulting discs is slower than with text- or thumbnail-based menus.

The menu templates look stylish, and any graphical object can be moved, resized, made semi-transparent and skewed to give a 3D effect. Templates start with a short animated intro sequence where the various buttons, video thumbnails and text slide or spin into video, and end with a transition into the selected video. These effects look smart but there isn't much scope for customisation and they can get a bit tedious. It's possible to turn them off but you'll need to do so in three different places if you just want menus that react immediately to button selection. A small collection of annoying background music is supplied, but it's not hard to add your own, truncate its length and fade it in and out. We would have liked to be able to decide how many buttons there are per page as the only way to do this is to select a template with the desired number. Disc-navigation options comprise a single global option to return to the menu at the end of a video, or proceed to the next one.

DVD MovieFactory 6 is a competent program that's capable of attractive DVD menus. It's mostly easy to use, although with the lack of an Undo function and the fact that the Help button is often inaccessible, it could be better in this respect. Its HD disc support still seems a little shaky but it's well ahead of the competition. Ultimately, though, the almost complete lack of disc-navigation options is the software's biggest drawback. Roxio MyDVD (included in Easy Media Creator Suite, page 126) and Sony DVD Architect Studio (What's New: Software, Shopper April 2007) are much better in this respect.

Ben Pitt



◀ DVD MovieFactory's menus are highly customisable

WEBSITE PROS

NetObjects Fusion 10

★★★★

£135 inc VAT

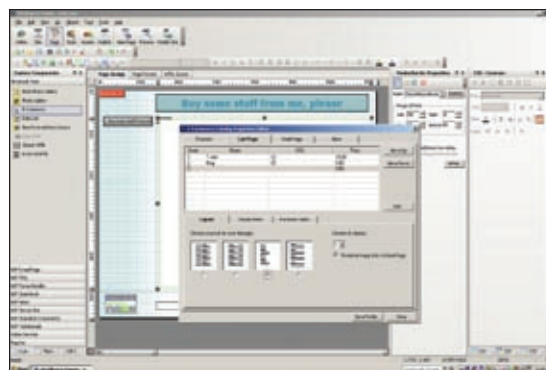
NetObjects Fusion is a web-design package aimed at small business users who know nothing about HTML. It allows you to design a website visually, rather than typing in code, and upload it to a web server without the need for any other software. A useful wizard helps you to create a simple site in less than a minute. After editing the text on each page and inserting relevant images into the areas marked with placeholders, you'll have a functional website ready in no time.

We've always been impressed by a few of Fusion's features, and its e-commerce system in particular. This integrates with PayPal or the online shop facility provided by 1&1 UK, and allows you to create a simple catalogue of products quickly. If you want to sell only a handful of products, it's a great way of doing business online without any complicated software to set up. If you do want to build something more complicated, you can use the database connection facilities. Fusion can create dynamic webpages with database content using ASP, PHP and ASP.NET, but we discovered that entering one of the database

settings incorrectly could cause the software to hang when your website is published.

Version 10 of Fusion has a few interesting new features. The Flash photo album tool allows you to create an interactive photo album. With one large picture and thumbnails that allow users to select the image that they wish to view, it's a simple way to put a few pictures online. Fusion's own interface has been overhauled as well. When you start the application, you're presented with a start page that's packed with all the design clichés of a 'web 2.0' site, namely tabs, large sans-serif fonts and reflective shadows. The layout of Fusion's toolbars is now easy to customise, so you can rearrange everything to suit the way you work.

Unfortunately, there are many areas in which Fusion feels decidedly outdated. Its templates don't appear to have changed significantly since the last version, and none looks as modern as Fusion's own start page. We were particularly disappointed that this latest version still exports pages in HTML 4.01 transitional, a



▲ Fusion's e-commerce tool is very easy to use, and allows you to build a simple online shop using PayPal

standard first introduced in 1999. There's no facility to produce pages written in the more modern XHTML. The pages Fusion produces validate as correct HTML 4.01 transitional, but the CSS stylesheets included errors and failed to validate. Some CSS formatting didn't display properly in Firefox. When we checked the browser-compatibility settings we were amazed to see that they included compatibility options for Netscape Navigator 4.x and Internet Explorer 4. Netscape 4 was a popular browser in the late 1990s, but is now horrendously out of date.

Overall, Fusion 10 disappointed us. Its new Flash photo album feature is handy and the e-commerce tool is as good as ever, but the software and the pages it creates feel stuck in the past. It's still easy to use, but we recommend using software that enables you to create pages using more modern technologies such as valid XHTML and CSS.

Tom Royal

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Still doesn't support XHTML
- ✗ Design templates look dated

WEB-DESIGN SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 250MB disk space, Internet Explorer 6 or later, Macromedia Flash Player 8 or later
 SUPPLIER www.netobjects.com
 DETAILS www.netobjects.com

Also consider...

MICROSOFT

Works Suite 2006

★★★★★

£43 inc VAT

Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and is very business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.

OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
 PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.microsoft.com/worksuite Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta ✗ Old version of Word FULL REVIEW Mar 2006



SONY

Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

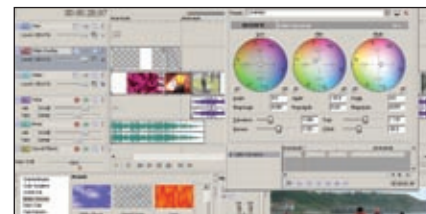
★★★★★

£59 inc VAT

Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
 PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com
 ✗ Lots of powerful new features ✗ DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



NOTION Protégé

★★★★

£79 inc VAT

Protégé is one of the most affordable music-notation programs around but it still has high aspirations as a serious creative and educational tool. It's a cut-down version of Notion 1.5, which isn't currently available in the UK but sells in the US for \$599 (around £307). The main difference is that scores in Protégé are limited to eight instruments.

At first we were baffled by the interface, but after 10 minutes with the Getting Started PDF tutorial we were fine. Note entry is swift with good use of keyboard short cuts, though editing and deleting could be much better. Sadly, the software lets the user enter notes that are outside the range of the given instrument. Entering too many notes in a bar makes them appear red, but it isn't prohibited.

The layout of scores adjusts automatically to present the music in a clear manner.

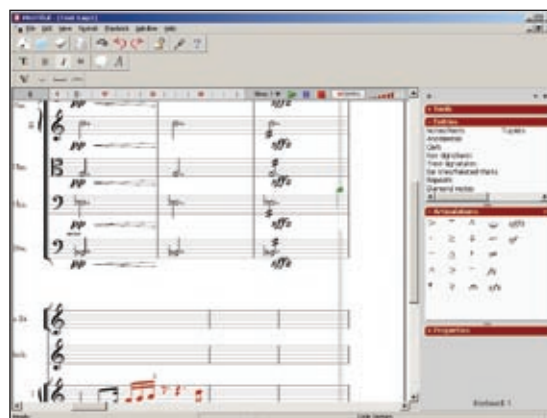
However, it's not a foolproof system: the notes themselves look neat but certain markings sit uncomfortably close to one another, which makes scores look less than professional. Titles and subtitles sometimes appeared on top of one another. We were even more alarmed to see that

the bottom stave disappeared off the page when printing, but this was cured by changing from the default Legal paper size to A4. We saw a few other minor bugs and experienced quite a few crashes, but at least the auto-backup facility managed to recover our work each time.

The library of orchestral sounds for score playback is fantastic.

Drawing on extensive recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra, the result is lively and polished. Articulations such as sforzandi and trills are reproduced, but dynamics move in blocks, with no ability to simulate crescendos or diminuendos.

Protégé feels crude and awkward compared with Sibelius 4 (*What's New, Shopper* December 2005), a phenomenally powerful notation program that offers attractive automatic formatting along with accessible controls to edit just about anything. Both programs have a steep initial learning curve, but after a few hours' use, Sibelius became a breeze to use, whereas Protégé remained relatively clumsy and inflexible. However,



▲ Notes and markings are easy to enter but not so easy to edit

this is an unfair comparison, as Sibelius costs around £450. Those with limited funds are more likely to consider Sibelius Student Edition, which costs £116 and includes the same core notation tools, though without various advanced features and some more important ones such as part extraction for creating individual parts for performers. Like Protégé, it's limited to eight instruments per score, but unlike Protégé, it lacks a built-in synthesiser for score playback.

This makes choosing one over the other more difficult. The issue that sways it for us is the fact that the eight-instrument limitation in both packages is quite miserly, and so an upgrade is pretty much inevitable for anyone who is serious about score production. With this in mind, we'd recommend getting on the bottom rung of the better ladder and going for Sibelius Student Edition.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ High-quality sounds for playback
- ✗ Limited to eight instruments
- ✗ Awkward and unstable in places

MUSIC-NOTATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP or Mac OS X 10.3.9, 1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM (3GHz, 1GB recommended), 1.5GB disk space
SUPPLIER www.notionmusic.com
DETAILS www.notionmusic.com

Also consider...

CLOUDMARK Desktop for Outlook

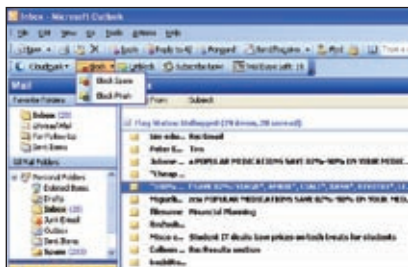
★★★★★

£24 inc VAT

BEST BUY Cloudmark Desktop is available for Outlook and Outlook Express. The software connects to a large database of spam messages maintained by other users, so it has a high probability of detecting spam. Any spam classifications you make are fed back into the database, improving Cloudmark's detection rates.

It was the clear winner of our anti-spam Labs test in *Shopper* December 2006.

ANTI-SPAM SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Outlook or Outlook Express **SUPPLIER** Cloudmark 020 7100 5224 **DETAILS** www.cloudmark.com ✓ Excellent anti-spam detection ✗ Outlook/Outlook Express users only **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2006



MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT

BEST BUY Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL is a great way to convert your vinyl LPs to CD, cleaning up the sound in the process to give excellent results. This version includes all the necessary hardware you need to record directly from records to your PC. It's also a great tool for music and video production, and the audio CD-authoring tools are particularly good.

AUDIO-RESTORATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B0001WZXMK **SUPPLIER** www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.magix.co.uk ✓ Complete package for converting vinyl ✗ Interface a bit rough around the edges **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



CAKEWALK Sonar 6 Producer Edition

★★★★★

£329 inc VAT

BEST BUY Sonar 6 is the best music-production software you can buy. Its professional-quality effects and instruments go way beyond those of the competition. Other packages will appeal to certain niche groups, but if you want the best of everything Sonar still pretty much rules the roost.

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 1.3GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space
SUPPLIER www.dolphinmusic.co.uk **DETAILS** www.cakewalk.com ✓ Comprehensive audio suite ✗ AudioSnap doesn't live up to expectations **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007



CITRIX ONLINE GoToMyPC 6



£13 inc VAT per month

Your home or work PC is probably full of important files and applications. Rather than doing without them when you're away, you can use Citrix Online's GoToMyPC 6 to access your PC remotely from any online PC.

As with previous versions, you have to install a small server application on the PC you want to control. This can configure itself automatically to deal with most firewalls. You can then log into your account from any remote computer with a web browser and control your PC remotely. The full desktop is replicated, and you can control it with your keyboard and mouse to perform almost any job you'd normally do in front of your computer. There are practical limits, though, as you won't have enough bandwidth to stream video or games.

For accessing standard office applications and documents, GoToMyPC 6 is fine. We found the remote control to be very quick over our broadband connection, with only a slight delay.

The file-transfer application is largely unchanged from previous versions. The Explorer-like application has a split-window view, with one pane for the remote

computer and one for the local computer. You can drag and drop files from one to the other, or synchronise a directory, which is handy if you want to work on common files between two computers. With this version you can also drag and drop files from the remote PC window to your local computer and vice versa. It's brilliant when you want to copy only one or two files.

One thing the file manager can't do is open a file stored on the local computer in an application on the remote computer. Instead, you have to copy all the files you want to work on to the remote PC, and remember to copy them back when you've finished.

This version also introduces support for sound, so you can hear anything played on your home computer. However, even at the highest quality setting, it's not good enough for listening to music, and there is little to be gained from hearing Windows' warning sounds. In most cases you'd be better off copying the file you want to hear to your local computer and turning off the sound option altogether.

SUMMARY

- ☒ Good printer support
- ☒ Efficient and robust
- ☒ Limited video and sound streaming

REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, Internet Explorer 5.0, Firefox 1.0 or Netscape 7.0, broadband internet
SUPPLIER www.gotomypc.com
DETAILS www.gotomypc.com



▲ Access all your files from any other internet-connected PC with GoToMyPC

The best feature in version 6 is the print server, which allows you to print from the remote computer to a printer attached to the computer at which you're sitting. GoToMyPC detects which printers are installed on the local PC and guides you through the process of installing the driver on your remote PC. This is particularly useful for printing files from applications installed on your remote PC that you don't have on the PC where you're currently working.

GoToMyPC 6 is a robust remote access application that works very well, and we love the way you can drag and drop files directly between your local and remote PC. Except for this feature, though, GoToMyPC doesn't do anything that LogMeIn Pro can't. LogMeIn is also cheaper at \$13 (around £6.60) a month, and if all you want is remote control, there's even a free version.

David McKinnon

ACRONIS True Image 10 Home



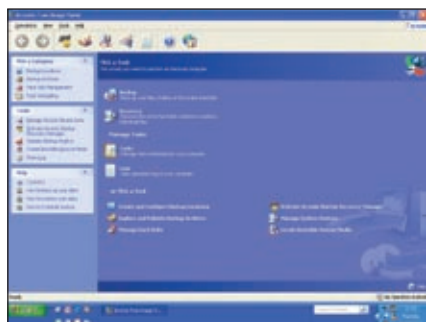
£24 inc VAT



True Image 10 from Acronis makes a complete copy of your PC, operating system and all, so you can restore it to working state easily.

It can make backups of folders and emails and even back up the settings of applications, providing you with everything you need to make sure your data is protected at all times.

IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 and later, 133MHz processor, 128MB, 150MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE ATI10 SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.acronis.com ☒ Easy to use ☒ Some features not that useful FULL REVIEW Apr 2007



AVANQUEST RadioTracker 2



£20 inc VAT



RadioTracker 2 makes finding new music easy by downloading tracks automatically from internet radio stations. Simply select the genre of music you like and the software does the rest. A new feature enables you to pick specific tracks you want – the simple way to find a rarely heard classic.

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 128MB RAM, 500MHz processor, 100MB disk space
SUPPLIER <http://shop.avanquest.com> DETAILS www.avanquest.com ☒ Downloads the music you want ☒ Can't delete unwanted tracks easily FULL REVIEW Feb 2007



MOZILLA Firefox 2.0



Free



The best browser on the market has just got even better with Firefox 2.0. New features include short cuts to search popular websites and a phishing filter. Tabs are easier to manage, and if your browser crashes, it reloads them all the next time you start the application.

Firefox is fast and easy to use, and remains our favourite browser.

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or later, 233MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 50MB disk space DETAILS www.mozilla.com ☒ Reloads tabs after a crash ☒ Fast Find doesn't have a next button FULL REVIEW Feb 2007



VIRTUALBOX

VirtualBox 1.3.6 for Windows Hosts

★★★★★

Free

VirtualBox 1.3.6 for Windows Hosts lets you create and run virtual computers from within Windows (see FAQ), like the similar VMWare Server or VMWare Player (www.vmware.com). However, VirtualBox is easier to configure and doesn't need a licence key.

The process of building a virtual machine is simple thanks to VirtualBox's wizard. Just tell it what operating system you want to use from a wide selection and how much memory you want to devote to it. You also need to create at least one virtual hard disk, which exists as a file on your PC.

You can use your PC's optical drive and boot your machine from an installation CD such as Windows XP, or you can mount an ISO CD image and boot directly from that. The installation process runs as if you were installing it on a fresh PC.

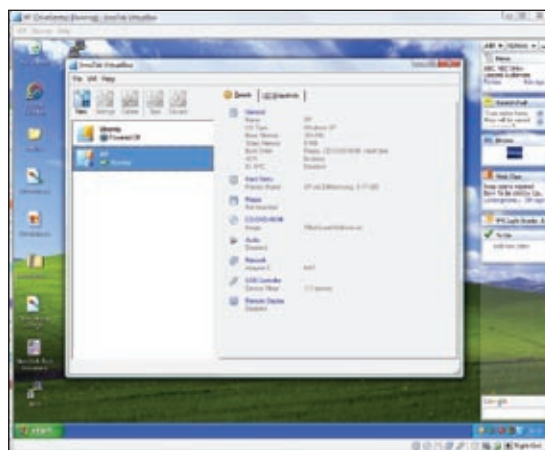
If you're installing a licensed operating system, you'll need a valid CD key for it, just as if you were installing on a real PC.

Virtual machines aren't available only from your physical PC; you can also enable each machine for Remote

Desktop Protocol (RDP) connections over a network. It's a little tricky to set up, though, so we'd leave this feature alone unless you really need it. It's one feature that VMWare doesn't offer.

Performance was excellent. Running Windows XP in a virtual machine on a Core 2 Duo X6800, we got a benchmark score of 133; VMWare Player running XP scored only 106. Sharing files between a virtual machine and your real computer can be tricky, as you can't simply drag and drop files from the virtual PC to your desktop or vice versa. You have two options. First, you can set up a shared folder on your physical PC and access it through the virtual one. Second, you can map a USB flash

drive to your virtual PC and access it through that. The process can be tricky, though; we bluescreened our virtual computer a few times when we got it wrong. We'd have liked to have been able to mount a virtual hard disk on our physical computer to copy files directly, though.



▲ VirtualBox 1.3.6 provides you with a virtual machine on which you can test software and the like in safety

You can map other USB devices in a similar way to storage, so you can use printers, scanners and pretty much any other device on your virtual computer as you would on your real computer.

VirtualBox can record snapshots of your virtual machines, which are a bit like restore points in Windows, so you can restore a computer to a previous state. However, we got this to work only in Windows XP and not Vista, so look out for an updated version soon.

Aside from these little problems, VirtualBox is a surprisingly mature application that supports the latest operating systems. If you want to test other operating systems, run multiple versions of applications or test some software before you let it loose on your PC, it's a life-saver and slightly easier to configure than VMWare's Server.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Works with Vista
- ✓ Fast emulation
- ✗ Can crash when using advanced features

VIRTUALISATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows NT/2000/XP/Vista, 128MB free system memory, 22MB disk space, 1GB disk space for virtual hard disks
SUPPLIER www.virtualbox.org
DETAILS www.virtualbox.org

Also consider...

MICROSOFT

Encarta Reference Library 2007

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT



Encarta is the best encyclopedia you can get for your PC. It's easy to search and illustrates a lot of its entries with multimedia items that really help kids learn. Its articles are quite short, but external links take you to more in-depth content. It provides a stunning balance of facts and fun.

ENCYCLOPEDIA Requires 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 83012047

SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com **DETAILS** www.microsoft.com

✓ Friendly interface and excellent multimedia ✗ Lacks depth in some articles **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



MR SITE

Takeaway Website

★★★★★

£30 for the first year; £2.49/month from then on



Takeaway Website is everything you need to build your own website. Its price includes hosting for a year, a domain name and a website design package. There are templates for creating blogs, guest books, feedback forms and galleries, which makes this perfect for the beginner.

WEBSITE CREATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Internet Explorer 6 **SUPPLIER** www.mrsite.com **DETAILS** www.mrsite.com ✓ Excellent value; powerful site creation tools ✗ Style options are limited **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007



DISKEEPER

Diskeeper 2007 Home

★★★★★

£24 inc VAT



Over time your hard disk can get untidy, with fragments of files spreading across the entire disk. Diskeeper 2007 puts them all back together again, improving disk performance. It does all this behind the scenes, so once you've configured it, you'll never have to go near it again.

It's not the most exciting application, but it's essential for a smooth-running PC.

DEFRAGMENTATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP. Maximum drive size 768GB **SUPPLIER** www.diskeeper.com **DETAILS** www.diskeeper.com ✓ Efficient defragmentation ✗ Not worth upgrading from previous version **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007





▲ EffectsLab Pro is perfect for adding high-octane drama to your video productions

FXHOME EffectsLab Pro

★★★★★

£90 inc VAT

EffectsLab Pro is there for the fun things in life, such as explosions, gun shots, lightsaber battles, meteorites, lightning and smoke effects, to name a few of its capabilities. Its principal tools are animated image generators that are overlaid on to video clips, although the toolbox also includes a selection of more conventional effects such as blur, colour correction and distortion.

Our favourite effect is the particle generator. This begins with a bitmap – the particle – multiple instances of which are emitted from a source area at a specified rate, speed, direction and size. The list of parameters is long and initially bewildering, but within an hour we were creating everything from blood spatters to smoking chimneys. It can't simulate an explosion in 3D space; instead, particles radiate in two dimensions. The program accounts for gravity and momentum but not air resistance, which would be useful for dust particles. Even so, the sheer pleasure of designing computer-generated mayhem meant we didn't mind spending hours combining multiple effects to achieve the desired result.

The Muzzle Flashes effect specialises in flashes of light from guns and includes a handy tool for directing the projectile, this time in 3D. Two more effects cover neon lights and optical flares, both of which offer the same versatility and depth of programming as the particle generator. Each effect has an excellent preset library, but it's a shame that there are no global size, position and speed controls in addition to the keyframable settings, as this would make it much easier to use presets in different settings.

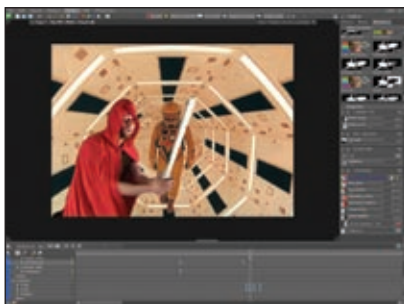
The same drawbacks described in our review of CompositeLab Pro (right) apply to EffectsLab, but we've given it full marks simply because it's such fun to use. If you've ever toyed with the idea of making your own action movie, now there's simply no excuse not to.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fun toys for making your own action films
- ✓ Highly customisable, realistic effects
- ✗ Photo-realistic results take time and skill

VIDEO-EFFECTS SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000 (SP4)/XP (SP1), 800MHz Pentium III processor, 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), 100MB disk space, DirectX 9.0b
SUPPLIER www.fxhome.com
DETAILS www.fxhome.com



▲ Drop in on the set of your favourite films with CompositeLab Pro

FXHOME CompositeLab Pro

★★★★

£90 inc VAT

Chroma keying, or the 'green screen' effect, is the technique used in newsrooms and Hollywood to superimpose one layer of video over another. It's available in most low-cost video-editing software, but these simplistic versions rarely yield convincing results.

CompositeLab Pro specialises in chroma keying and other related techniques for superimposing clips. Its chroma-keying effect isn't particularly powerful, but the supporting cast makes the package capable of excellent results. Crucially, you can manipulate video to alter how it's keyed without affecting its appearance. For example, you can shrink the keyed area to eliminate a halo of green around your subjects, cut out areas manually or simplify the shape of the key with a combination of blur and sharpen, which is ideal for eliminating noise caused by compression artefacts. There's a strong collection of more conventional effects on tap, plus decent object motion, but no full bezier control of motion paths. It supports HD formats and handles interlaced footage intelligently.

The interface is designed for enthusiasts rather than casual users, with vast lists of properties for each effect and comprehensive keyframe controls that allow values to change over time. While we welcome such precise controls, they could be better implemented. The program often generated keyframes when we didn't want them, and any adjustments you make with the parameter sliders are visible only when you release the mouse button, rather than continually. There's only one level of undo and no contextual Help facility.

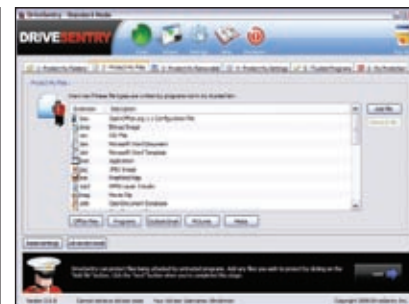
You can achieve similar results and more besides with more expensive software, such as Adobe After Effects, and even with the low-cost Sony Vegas Movie Studio, but despite its quirks, CompositeLab Pro handles its task well and is reasonably priced.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Powerful, high-quality keying effects
- ✓ A strong collection of supporting features
- ✗ Controls and help could be better

VIDEO-COMPOSITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), 100MB disk space, DirectX 9.0b
SUPPLIER www.fxhome.com
DETAILS www.fxhome.com



▲ DriveSentry provides an extra layer of protection for your hard disk

DRIVESENTRY INC DriveSentry

★★★★★

\$29 (around £15)

DriveSentry sits between your applications and your files to prevent unauthorised access and damage from viruses that your anti-virus application has missed.

A wizard defines which folders and file types you want to protect, and scans your installed applications, setting the file types each can access. Finally, it protects your Internet Explorer settings and the Registry, and stops executable files downloading.

If an application breaks these rules and tries to access an unauthorised file type, DriveSentry displays a message that gives you four options: Allow & Remember always allows the offending application to access that file type; Allow Once lets it access the file type once; Deny stops the file access; and Deny and Terminate stops the file access and kills the offending process. It also warns you if an application that you trust has been changed, which is often a sign of a virus infection, although applying a patch can also cause this.

The protection was thorough and we couldn't find a way of breaking the rules without provoking a warning message. The main problem is that security is ultimately up to the user. For example, we clicked Allow & Remember the first time we downloaded an executable file, and from then on we could do the same thing without being prompted.

DriveSentry tries to help with its Online Advice button, which shows you how other people have treated the application that caused the message, but it's not foolproof. When we chose to edit a JPEG file with Notepad, which would corrupt the image, the Online Advice recommended that we allow write access.

That said, if you're willing to check each unauthorised file access, DriveSentry offers an extra layer of protection should your first layer miss something, but you should always keep your anti-virus software up to date.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Protects key files
- ✓ Wizard setup easy to use
- ✗ Easy to allow a malicious application access

SECURITY SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 500MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 2MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.drivesentry.com
DETAILS www.drivesentry.com